

# On the Turán number of forests

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## Abstract

The Turán number of a graph  $H$ ,  $\text{ex}(n, H)$ , is the maximum number of edges in a graph on  $n$  vertices which does not have  $H$  as a subgraph. We determine the Turán number and find the unique extremal graph for forests consisting of paths when  $n$  is sufficiently large. This generalizes a result of Bushaw and Kettle [Combinatorics, Probability and Computing 20:837–853, 2011]. We also determine the Turán number and extremal graphs for forests consisting of stars of arbitrary order.

## 1 Introduction

Notation in this paper is standard. For a graph  $G$  let  $E(G)$  be the set of edges and  $V(G)$  be the set of vertices. The *order* of a graph is the number of vertices. The number of edges of  $G$  is denoted  $e(G) = |E(G)|$ . For a graph  $G$  with subgraph  $H$ , the graph  $G - H$  is the induced subgraph on vertex set  $V(G) \setminus V(H)$  i.e.  $G[V(G) \setminus V(H)]$ . For  $U \subset V(G)$  we define  $N(U)$  to be the set of vertices in  $V(G) \setminus U$  that have a neighbor in  $U$ . While the *common neighborhood* of  $U \subset V(G)$  is the set of vertices in  $V(G) \setminus U$  that are adjacent to every vertex in  $U$ . We denote the degree of a vertex  $v$  by  $d(v)$  and the minimum degree in a graph by  $\delta(G)$ . A *universal vertex* in  $G$  is a vertex that is adjacent to all other vertices in  $G$ . A *star forest* is a forest whose connected components are stars and a *linear forest* is a forest whose connected components are paths. A path on  $k$  vertices is denoted  $P_k$  and a star with  $k + 1$  vertices is denoted  $S_k$ . Superscript is used to denote the index of a particular graph in a set of graphs. Let  $k \cdot H$  denote the graph of the disjoint union of  $k$  copies of the graph  $H$ .

The *Turán number*,  $\text{ex}(n, H)$ , of a graph  $H$  is the maximum number of edges in a graph on  $n$  vertices which does not contain  $H$  as a subgraph. The problem of determining Turán numbers is one of the cornerstones of graph theory. The traditional starting point of extremal

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graph theory is a theorem of Mantel (see e.g. [1]) that the maximum number of edges in a triangle-free graph is  $\lfloor \frac{n^2}{4} \rfloor$ . Turán [17, 18] generalized this result to find the extremal graph of any complete graph. In particular he showed that  $\text{ex}(n, K_r) = \binom{r-2}{r-1} \cdot \frac{n^2}{2}$ . The Erdős-Stone-Simonovits Theorem [10, 9] states that asymptotically Turán's construction is best-possible for any  $r$ -chromatic graph  $H$  (as long as  $r > 2$ ). More precisely  $\text{ex}(n, H) = \binom{r-2}{r-1} \cdot \frac{n^2}{2} + o(n^2)$ . Thus when  $H$  is bipartite the Erdős-Stone-Simonovits only states that  $\text{ex}(n, H) = o(n^2)$ . The Turán number of bipartite graphs includes many classical theorems. For example for complete bipartite graphs Kővári-Sós-Turán Theorem [15] gives  $\text{ex}(n, K_{s,t}) = O(n^{2-1/s})$  (also see e.g. [8, 4, 12]) and for even cycles Bondy and Simonovits [2] have  $\text{ex}(n, C_{2k}) \leq n^{1+1/k}$ .

In 1959, Erdős and Gallai [7] determined the Turán number for paths. We state the theorem here as it is an important tool in our proofs.

**Theorem 1** ([7]). *For any  $k, n > 1$ ,  $\text{ex}(n, P_k) \leq \frac{k-2}{2}n$ , where equality holds for the graph of disjoint copies of  $K_{k-1}$ .*

A well-known conjecture of Erdős and Sós [6] states that the Turán number for paths is enough for any tree i.e. a graph  $G$  on  $n$  vertices and more than  $\frac{k-2}{2}n$  edges contains any tree on  $k$  vertices. A proof of the Erdős-Sós Conjecture for large trees was announced by Ajtai, Komlós, Simonovits and Szemerédi.

A natural extension of the problem is the determination of the Turán number of forests. Erdős and Gallai [7] considered the graph  $H$  consisting of  $k$  independent edges (note that  $H$  is a linear forest) and found  $\text{ex}(n, H) = \max\{\binom{k-1}{2} + (k-1)(n-k+1), \binom{2k-1}{k}\}$ . When  $n$  is large enough compared to  $k$ , the extremal graph attaining this bound is obtained by adding  $k-1$  universal vertices to an independent set of  $n-k+1$  vertices. This construction clearly does not contain  $k$  independent edges as every such edge must include at least one of the universal vertices. This construction forms a model for the constructions presented throughout the paper. Brandt [3] generalized the above result by proving that any graph  $G$  with  $e(G) > \max\{\binom{k-1}{2} + (k-1)(n-k+1), \binom{2k-1}{k}\}$  contains every forest on  $k$  edges without isolated vertices.

Recently, Bushaw and Kettle [5] found the Turán number and extremal graph for the linear forest with components of the same order  $l > 2$ . When  $l = 3$  this proves a conjecture of Gorgol [14]. We generalize this theorem by finding the Turán number and extremal graph for arbitrary linear forests.

**Theorem 2.** *Let  $F$  be a linear forest with components of order  $v_1, v_2, \dots, v_k$ . If at least one  $v_i$  is not 3, then for  $n$  sufficiently large,*

$$\text{ex}(n, F) = \left( \sum_{i=1}^k \left\lfloor \frac{v_i}{2} \right\rfloor - 1 \right) \left( n - \sum_{i=1}^k \left\lfloor \frac{v_i}{2} \right\rfloor + 1 \right) + \left( \sum_{i=1}^k \left\lfloor \frac{v_i}{2} \right\rfloor - 1 \right) + c,$$

where  $c = 1$  if all  $v_i$  are odd and  $c = 0$  otherwise. Moreover, the extremal graph is unique.

Notice that the theorem avoids the case of linear forest with every component of order three. This case was solved by Bushaw and Kettle [5]. We will also solve it as a special

case of a star forest handled by Theorem 3 as  $P_3$  is the star with two leaves  $S_2$ . We prove Theorem 2 in Section 2 and describe the unique  $F$ -free graph on  $n$  vertices with  $\text{ex}(n, F)$  edges.

Another motivation is the following conjecture of Goldberg and Magdon-Ismail [13]:

*Let  $F$  be a forest with  $k$  components, then every graph  $G$  with at least  $e(F) + k$  vertices and average degree  $> e(F) - 1$  contains  $F$  as a subgraph.*

This is a natural generalization of the Erdős-Sós Conjecture, however it is false. From Theorem 2, some simple calculation shows that the conjecture fails for linear forests with at least two components of even order.

We also investigate the other extreme case when each component is a star and we determine the Turán number find all the extremal graphs.

**Theorem 3.** *Let  $F = \bigcup_{i=1}^k S^i$  be a star forest where  $d_i$  is the maximum degree of  $S^i$  and  $d_1 \geq d_2 \geq \dots \geq d_k$ . For  $n$  sufficiently large, the Turán number for  $F$  is*

$$\text{ex}(n, F) = \max_{1 \leq i \leq k} \left\{ (i-1)(n-i+1) + \binom{i-1}{2} + \left\lfloor \frac{d_i-1}{2}(n-i+1) \right\rfloor \right\}.$$

Note that for a single component, Theorem 3 describes the Turán number of a star i.e. the maximum number of edges in a graph of fixed maximum degree. We prove Theorem 3 and characterize all extremal graphs in Section 3. The last section contains a result about forests with small components. In the proofs of Theorem 2 and Theorem 3 we make no attempt to minimize the bound on  $n$ .

## 2 Linear forests

We first consider the Turán problem for a linear forest. Throughout this section, unless otherwise specified,  $F$  is a linear forest i.e.  $F = \bigcup_{i=1}^k P^i$ , such that  $P^i$  is a path on  $v_i$  vertices and  $v_1 \geq v_2 \geq \dots \geq v_k \geq 2$ .

Bushaw and Kettle [5] determined the Turán number and extremal graph for forests of paths of the same order.

**Theorem 4** ([5]). *Let  $F$  be a linear forest such that each component has order  $\ell$ . For  $n$  large enough if  $\ell = 3$ , then*

$$\text{ex}(n, k \cdot P_3) = \binom{k-1}{2} + (n-k+1)(k-1) + \left\lfloor \frac{n-k+1}{2} \right\rfloor.$$

*if  $\ell \geq 4$ , then*

$$\text{ex}(n, k \cdot P_\ell) = \binom{k \left\lfloor \frac{\ell}{2} \right\rfloor - 1}{2} + \left( k \left\lfloor \frac{\ell}{2} \right\rfloor - 1 \right) \left( n - k \left\lfloor \frac{\ell}{2} \right\rfloor + 1 \right) + c,$$

*where  $c = 1$  if  $\ell$  is odd, and  $c = 0$  if  $\ell$  is even.*

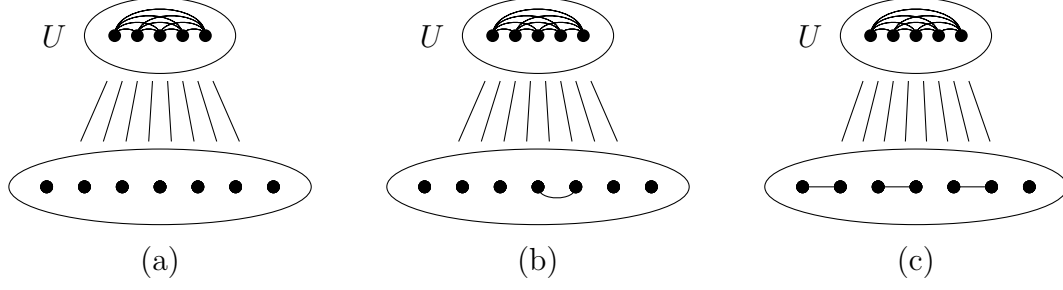


Figure 1:  $G_F(n)$ , (a) is the case where at least one path  $F$  is of even order, (b) is the case where all paths in  $F$  are of odd order. Figure (c) is the extremal graph for  $k \cdot P_3$ .

The extremal graph for  $k$  copies of  $P_3$  is a set of  $k - 1$  universal vertices and a maximal matching among the  $n - k + 1$  remaining vertices. See Figure 1(c). We note that that this is the extremal graph for  $k \cdot S_2$  in Section 3. The extremal graph for longer paths is in Figure 1(a) and (b) with  $k \lfloor \frac{l}{2} \rfloor - 1$  universal vertices.

Let  $F$  be a linear forest where at least one  $v_i$  is not 3. Define  $G_F(n)$  to be the graph on  $n$  vertices with a set  $U$  of  $\left(\sum_{i=1}^k \lfloor v_i/2 \rfloor\right) - 1$  universal vertices together with a single edge in  $G_F(n) - U$  if each  $v_i$  is odd or  $n - |U|$  independent vertices otherwise (see Figure 1). Observe that  $G_F(n)$  is  $F$ -free. Indeed, any path  $P^i$  in  $G_F(n)$  uses at least  $\lfloor v_i/2 \rfloor$  vertices from  $U$ , and  $|U| < \sum_i \lfloor v_i/2 \rfloor$ . When every component is the same, then  $G_F(n)$  is exactly the extremal graph given by Bushaw and Kettle [5]. We show that  $G_F(n)$  is the unique extremal graph for a linear forest  $F$ .

First, let us consider the base case when  $F$  consists of only two paths and by Theorem 4 we may assume they are of different lengths.

**Theorem 5.** *Suppose  $F = P_a \cup P_b$ , with  $a > b \geq 2$ . Let  $G$  be any  $F$ -free  $n$ -vertex graph with  $n \geq \binom{a}{a/2}^2 a^4 b^4$ . Then  $e(G) \leq e(G_F(n))$ , with equality only when  $G \simeq G_F(n)$ .*

We use a standard trick to reduce the problem to graphs with large minimum degree.

**Lemma 6.** *Suppose  $F = P_a \cup P_b$ , with  $a > b \geq 2$ . Let  $G$  be any  $F$ -free  $n$ -vertex graph with  $n \geq \binom{a}{a/2} a^2 b^2$  and  $\delta(G) \geq \lfloor a/2 \rfloor + \lfloor b/2 \rfloor - 1$ . Then  $e(G) \leq e(G_F(n))$ , with equality only when  $G \simeq G_F(n)$ .*

We first show how Lemma 6 implies Theorem 5 and we give the proof of the lemma afterwards.

*Proof of Theorem 5 using Lemma 6.* Suppose  $G$  is an extremal graph for  $F$  on  $n > \binom{a}{a/2}^2 a^4 b^4$  vertices and  $e(G) \geq e(G_F(n))$ . We start by removing vertices of small degree from  $G$ . Suppose that there exists a vertex  $v$  in  $G$  with  $d(v) < \delta(G_F(n)) = \lfloor a/2 \rfloor + \lfloor b/2 \rfloor - 1$ . Let  $G^n = G$ . We then define  $G^{n-1} = G^n - \{v\}$ . We keep constructing  $G^{i-1}$  from  $G^i$  by removing

a vertex of degree less than  $\delta(G_F(i))$ . The process continues while  $\delta(G^i) < \delta(G_F(i))$ . Notice that

$$e(G^{i-1}) - e(G_F(i-1)) \geq e(G^i) - e(G_F(i)) + 1.$$

Hence the process terminates after  $n - \ell$  steps. We get  $G^\ell$  with  $\delta(G^\ell) \geq \delta(G_F(\ell))$  and

$$\binom{\ell}{2} \geq e(G^\ell) \geq e(G_F(\ell)) + n - \ell = (\lfloor a/2 \rfloor + \lfloor b/2 \rfloor - 1)\ell + n - \ell + O(a^2b^2),$$

this implies  $\ell > \sqrt{2n} \geq \binom{a}{\lfloor a/2 \rfloor} a^2b^2$ . Since  $e(G^\ell) > e(G_F(\ell))$ , Lemma 6 then implies  $F \subseteq G^\ell \subseteq G$ , a contradiction.  $\square$

*Proof of Lemma 6.* Let  $G$  be an extremal graph for  $F$  with  $\delta(G) \geq \lfloor a/2 \rfloor + \lfloor b/2 \rfloor - 1$ . First we show that there is a set  $U_a$  of  $\lfloor a/2 \rfloor$  vertices in which all the vertices share a large common neighborhood, in particular more than  $a + b$  common neighbors. Such a  $U_a$  can be easily extended to a copy of  $P_a$ , which implies  $G - U_a$  must be  $P_b$ -free. However,  $G - U_a$  is not  $P_{b-2}$ -free and hence we can find a set  $U_b$  of  $\lfloor b/2 \rfloor - 1$  vertices that share a large common neighborhood. Then we show that  $G - U_a - U_b$  has at most one edge, which then implies  $G \subseteq G_F(n)$ .

Because  $e(G) \geq e(G_F(n)) > \text{ex}(n, P_a)$  we have  $P_b \subseteq P_a \subseteq G$ . The following claim is a special case of Lemma 2.3 in [5]. We include a proof for the sake of completeness.

**Claim 1.** *Let  $P_x$  be a path such that  $x = a$  or  $x = b$ . Every  $P_x$  in  $G$  contains at least  $\lfloor \frac{x}{2} \rfloor$  vertices with common neighborhood larger than  $\frac{1}{x \binom{x}{\lfloor x/2 \rfloor}} n$ .*

*Proof.* For simplicity we prove for  $P_x = P_a$  and note that the proof for  $P_x = P_b$  is the same (we do not use the fact that  $a > b$ ). The graph  $G$  does not contain the forest  $P_a \cup P_b$ , so the graph  $G - P_a$  is  $P_b$ -free. Thus  $e(G - P_a) \leq \frac{b-2}{2}(n - a)$  by Erdős-Gallai (Theorem 1). Because  $e(G) \geq e(G_F(n))$  the number of edges between  $P_a$  and  $G - P_a$  is at least  $e(G_F(n)) - \binom{a}{2} - \frac{b-2}{2}(n - a)$ .

Let  $n_0$  be the number of vertices in  $G - P_a$  with at least  $\lfloor \frac{a}{2} \rfloor$  neighbors in  $P_a$ . Therefore the number of edges between  $P_a$  and  $G - P_a$  is at most  $n_0a + (n - a - n_0)(\lfloor \frac{a}{2} \rfloor - 1)$ . So

$$e(G_F(n)) - \binom{a}{2} - \frac{b-2}{2}(n - a) \leq n_0a + (n - a - n_0) \left( \left\lfloor \frac{a}{2} \right\rfloor - 1 \right).$$

Substituting the value of  $e(G_F(n))$  and solving for  $n_0$  we get

$$n_0 \geq \frac{n/2 + O(a^2b^2)}{a - \lfloor \frac{a}{2} \rfloor + 1}.$$

There are  $\binom{a}{\lfloor \frac{a}{2} \rfloor}$  sets of vertices of order  $\lfloor \frac{a}{2} \rfloor$  in  $P_a$ . Thus there is some set with a common neighborhood of order at least

$$\frac{n_0}{\binom{a}{\lfloor \frac{a}{2} \rfloor}} \geq \frac{n}{2a \binom{a}{\lfloor \frac{a}{2} \rfloor}} > a + b.$$

$\square$

As  $G$  is not  $P_a$ -free, let  $U_a$  be a set of vertices of large common neighborhood with  $|U_a| = \lfloor \frac{a}{2} \rfloor$  whose existence is guaranteed by Claim 1.

Observe that  $G - U_a$  is  $P_b$ -free. Indeed, suppose there is a copy of  $P_b$  in  $G - U_a$  and  $U_a$  can be extended to  $P_a$  avoiding vertices of  $P_b$ , since  $U_a$  has more than  $a + b$  common neighbors. Thus  $F \subseteq G$  which is a contradiction.

We now distinguish three cases based on the value of  $b$ . If  $b = 2$ , then  $G - U_a$  is  $P_2$ -free, namely  $G - U_a$  is empty. Thus  $G \subseteq G_F(n)$ .

Suppose that  $b = 3$ . Hence  $G - U_a$  contains only isolated edges and vertices as it does not contain a copy of  $P_3$ . If  $uv$  is an edge in  $G - U_a$  then both  $u$  and  $v$  have a neighbor in  $U_a$  due by the minimum degree  $\delta(G) \geq \lfloor a/2 \rfloor \geq 2$ . Furthermore, at most one of  $u$  and  $v$  is not adjacent to all vertices of  $U_a$ , otherwise a graph obtained from  $G$  by removing the edge  $uv$  and adding all edges between  $\{u, v\}$  and  $U_a$  has more edges while it is still  $F$ -free, which contradicts the extremality of  $G$ . Let  $z$  be a vertex in  $U_a$ . When  $a$  is even, then  $U_a \setminus z$  together with an edge in  $G - U_a$  complete a copy of  $P_a$ , and  $N(z) \cup \{z\}$  contains a  $P_3 = P_b$ , see Figure 2(a), thus  $F \subseteq G$ , contradiction. So  $G - U_a$  is empty if  $a$  is even. When  $a$  is odd, then two edges in  $G - U_a$  together with  $U_a \setminus z$  complete a copy of  $P_a$ , and again  $N(z) \cup \{z\}$  contains a  $P_b$ , see Figure 2(b), thus  $G - U_a$  has at most one edge. Therefore  $G \subseteq G_F(n)$ .

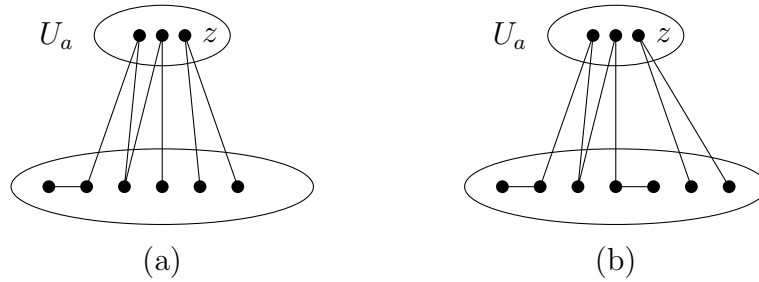


Figure 2: Cases for  $b = 3$ .

Now we may assume  $b \geq 4$ . Let  $|V(G - U_a)| = n'$ . Denote by  $G'$  the graph obtained by deleting  $\lfloor a/2 \rfloor$  universal vertices from  $G_F(n)$ , clearly  $|V(G')| = n'$ .

If  $G - U_a$  is  $P_{b-2}$ -free, then  $e(G - U_a) \leq (\frac{b}{2} - 2)n' < (\lfloor \frac{b}{2} \rfloor - 1)n' - \lfloor \frac{b}{2} \rfloor = e(G')$ , which implies  $e(G) < e(G_F(n))$  which is a contradiction. Thus we may assume  $G - U_a$  is not  $P_{b-2}$ -free. Take a maximum path,  $P$ , in  $G - U_a$  and let  $u$  be an end vertex. Since  $G - U_a$  is  $P_b$ -free,  $P$  has at most  $b - 1$  vertices. Then

$$d(u) - (|V(P)| - 1) \geq \delta(G) - b + 2 \geq \lfloor a/2 \rfloor + \lfloor b/2 \rfloor - 1 - b + 2 = \lfloor a/2 \rfloor - \lfloor b/2 \rfloor + 1 \geq 1.$$

Thus  $u$  has a neighbor, say  $w$ , not in  $P$ . Furthermore  $w$  must be in  $U_a$ , since otherwise we could extend  $P$  to a longer path in  $G - U_a$ . Then  $P$  with  $w$  and a neighbor of  $w$  in  $G - U_a - P$  form a  $P_b$ . By Claim 1 there is a set of  $\lfloor b/2 \rfloor$  vertices of  $P_b$  with a common neighborhood of order at least  $a + b$ . Note that all vertices in this  $P_b$  except  $w$  are in  $G - U_a$ . Thus we find a set of vertices in  $G - U_a$  of order  $\lfloor b/2 \rfloor - 1$ , call it  $U_b$ , with a large common neighborhood

( $U_b$  is nonempty since  $b \geq 4$ ). We are done if we show  $G - U_a - U_b$  is empty if one of  $a$  and  $b$  is even or has at most one edge when they are both odd, as this implies  $G \subseteq G_F(n)$ .

**Claim 2.**  $G$  is connected.

Suppose for contradiction that  $G$  is not connected. Then there exists a connected component  $C$  in  $G$  not containing  $U_a$ . The minimum degree  $\lfloor a/2 \rfloor + \lfloor b/2 \rfloor - 1 \geq b - 1$  implies that it is possible to find  $P_b$  in  $C$  (for example by a greedy algorithm). It contradicts the claim that  $G - U_a$  is  $P_b$ -free.  $\square$

Let  $H$  be a graph and let  $U \subset V(H)$  such that  $U$  has at least  $|U| + 3$  common neighbors. Furthermore, let  $1 \leq c \leq |U| + 1$ .

**Claim 3.** Let  $v \in N(U)$  be an endpoint of  $P_t$  in  $H - U$  where  $1 \leq t \leq 3$ . Then  $H$  contains a path  $P$  of order  $2c - 2 + t$  such that  $|P \cap U| = c - 1$ .

Let  $u \in U$  be a neighbor of  $v$ . Let  $P'$  be a path in  $H$  of order  $2c - 2$  starting at  $u$  and avoiding vertices of  $P_t$  and having at most  $c - 1$  vertices of  $U$ . It can be obtained in a greedy way from  $U$  and  $N(U) \setminus V(P_t)$  by alternating between  $U$  and  $N(U) \setminus V(P_t)$ . The path  $P_t$  can be used for extending  $P'$  and finding a path of order  $2c - 2 + t$ . See Figure 3(a) for case  $t = 3$ .  $\square$

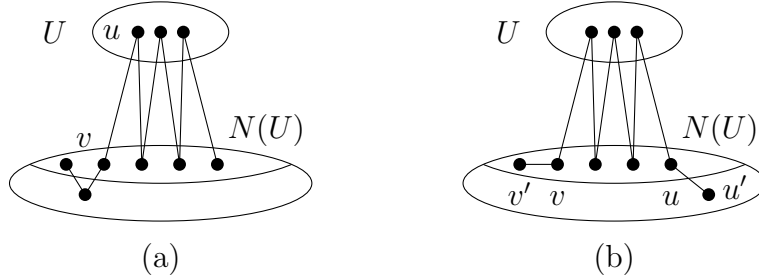


Figure 3: Finding a long path.

**Claim 4.** If there exist nonadjacent  $u, v \in N(U)$  both of degree at least one in  $H - U$  then  $H$  contains a path  $P$  of order  $2c + 1$  such that  $|P \cap U| = c - 1$ .

If there is a common neighbor of  $u$  and  $v$  then the claim follows from Claim 3 because  $u$  is an endpoint of a path of order three. Let  $u'$  and  $v'$  be distinct neighbors of  $u$  and  $v$ , respectively, in  $H - U$ . A greedily obtainable path with end vertices  $u$  and  $v$  avoiding  $u'$  and  $v'$  of order  $2c - 1$  can be extended by  $u'$  and  $v'$  to a path of order  $2c + 1$ . See Figure 3(b).  $\square$

**Claim 5.** There are at most two vertices in  $N(U_b) \setminus U_a$  that are not adjacent to all vertices of  $U_a$ .

Notice that if a vertex is not adjacent to all vertices of  $U_a \cup U_b$  then it has degree at least one in  $G - U_a - U_b$  because of the minimum degree condition. If there are at least three such vertices, Claim 3 or Claim 4 applies with  $H = G - U_a$ ,  $U_b$  in place of  $U$  and  $c = \lfloor \frac{b}{2} \rfloor$ . It leads to existence of a path of order  $2\lfloor \frac{b}{2} \rfloor + 1$  in  $G - U_a$  which is a contradiction.  $\square$

Let  $U$  be  $U_a \cup U_b$ . The previous claim together with the fact that vertices of  $U_b$  have many common neighbors implies that there is a common neighborhood of  $U$  of order at least  $\frac{n}{b\binom{b}{2}} - 2$ . Hence whenever we find in  $G$  a path of order  $a$  using at most  $\lfloor \frac{a}{2} \rfloor - 1$  vertices of  $U$  or a path of order  $b$  using at most  $\lfloor \frac{b}{2} \rfloor - 1$  vertices of  $U$  then we can easily find the other path of  $F$ .

**Claim 6.** *Every vertex in  $G - U$  is adjacent to a vertex of  $U$ .*

If a vertex  $v$  is not adjacent to any vertex of  $U$  then by connectivity and minimum degree condition of  $G$  it is easy to find a vertex  $u \in N(U)$  such that  $u$  is an end vertex of a path of order 3. Hence Claim 3 applies and gives a path of order  $b$  using  $\lfloor \frac{b}{2} \rfloor - 1$  vertices of  $U$  which is a contradiction.  $\square$

Hence  $N(U)$  are all the vertices of  $G - U$ . Claim 3 implies that  $G - U$  is  $P_3$ -free and together with Claim 4 this implies that  $G - U$  contains at most one edge. Moreover, if  $a$  or  $b$  is even, Claim 3 implies that  $G - U$  is  $P_2$ -free. Hence  $G - U$  contains no edges if  $a$  or  $b$  is even and contains at most one edge if both  $a$  and  $b$  are odd. Therefore,  $G$  is a subgraph of  $G_F(n)$ .  $\square$

Now we are ready to prove Theorem 2.

*Proof of Theorem 2.* We proceed the proof by induction on  $k$ , the number of paths in  $F$ . The base case,  $k = 2$ , is given by Theorem 5. Assume it is true for  $1 \leq \ell \leq k - 1$ . Pick  $j$  such that  $1 \leq j \leq k$  and  $F' = F - P^j$  is not  $(k - 1) \cdot P_3$ . Let  $G$  be an extremal graph for  $F$ . Take a  $P^j$  in  $G$ , by Claim 1, it contains a set  $U_j$  of  $\lfloor v_j/2 \rfloor$  vertices, whose vertices have many common neighbors. Similarly,  $G - U_j$  has to be  $F'$ -free, then by induction hypothesis  $G - U_j \simeq G_{F'}$ , thus  $G \subseteq G_F(n)$ . Hence  $G_F(n)$  is the unique extremal graph.  $\square$

### 3 Star forests

In this section we give a proof of Theorem 3.

Let  $F = \bigcup_{i=1}^k S^i$  be a star forest as in the statement of Theorem 3. Let  $d_i$  be the maximum degree of  $S^i$ . Recall that  $d_1 \geq d_2 \geq \dots \geq d_k$ .

We begin by describing the extremal graph for  $F$ . Let  $F(n, i)$  be a graph obtained by adding a set  $U$  of  $i - 1$  universal vertices to an extremal graph,  $H$ , for  $S^i$  on  $n - i + 1$  vertices. See Figure 4. Observe that  $H$  is a  $(d_i - 1)$ -regular graph if one of  $(d_i - 1)$  and  $n - i + 1$  is even and  $n$  large enough (see [16]). If both are odd, then  $H$  has exactly one vertex of degree  $(d_i - 2)$  and the remaining vertices have degree  $(d_i - 1)$ . Therefore we have  $e(H) = \lfloor \frac{d_i - 1}{2}(n - i + 1) \rfloor$ .

Observe that for all  $1 \leq i \leq k$ ,  $F(n, i)$  is  $F$ -free. Indeed, each star  $S^1, \dots, S^{i-1}$  must have at least one vertex from  $U$  and  $S^i$  is not a subgraph of  $F(n, i) - U$ .

Throughout the proof, unless otherwise specified,  $i$  is always the index maximizing the number of edges. Notice that  $e(F(n, i))$  is equal to the Turán number claimed by the theorem, i.e.



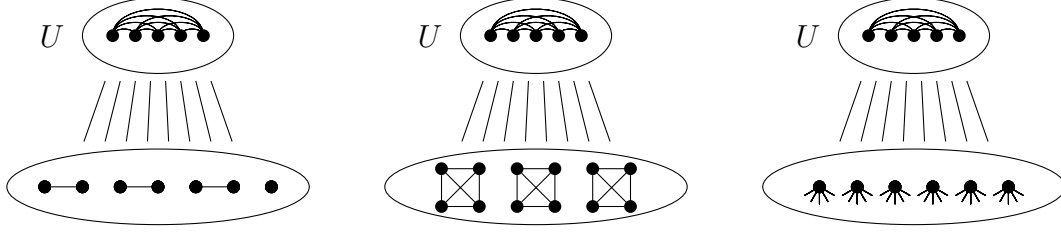


Figure 4: The extremal graph for a star-forest.

$$e(F(n, i)) = \left\lfloor \left( i - 1 + \frac{d_i - 1}{2} \right) n - \frac{i - 1}{2} (i + d_i - 1) \right\rfloor.$$

Define  $f_i = i - 1 + \frac{d_i - 1}{2}$ , namely  $f_i$  is the coefficient of  $n$ , the leading term of  $e(F(n, i))$ .

**Claim 7.** For any  $j < i$ ,  $f_j < f_i$ .

*Proof.* Suppose not. If  $f_j > f_i$ , then  $j$  would be the index maximizing the number of edges, contradiction. Thus assume  $f_j = f_i$ , we are done if  $e(F(n, j)) - e(F(n, i)) > 0$ , because this again contradicts the choice of  $i$ . Since  $f_j = f_i$ , the leading terms cancel. Furthermore  $i - 1 + \frac{d_i - 1}{2} = j - 1 + \frac{d_j - 1}{2}$  implies

$$d_j = d_i + 2(i - j). \quad (1)$$

Thus we have:

$$\begin{aligned} e(F(n, j)) - e(F(n, i)) &\geq \frac{i - 1}{2} (i + d_i - 1) - 1/2 - \frac{j - 1}{2} (j + d_j - 1) \\ &= \frac{i - 1}{2} (i + d_i - 1) - 1/2 - \frac{j - 1}{2} (j + d_i + 2(i - j) - 1) \quad \text{by (1)} \\ &= \frac{i - j}{2} (d_i + i - j) - 1/2 \\ &> 0 \end{aligned}$$

□

We use induction on  $k$ , the number of components of  $F$ . We prove the theorem in three cases distinguished by the index  $i$  that maximizes the number of edges: (1)  $i = k$ , (2)  $i \neq k$  and  $i \neq 1$ , and (3)  $i = 1$ .

**Case (1):**  $i = k$

Let  $F' = F - S^k$ . Let  $G$  be an extremal graph for  $F'$  with  $n$  vertices. By the induction hypothesis, we have  $\text{ex}(n, F') = e(F(n, i'))$ , where  $i'$  is the index maximizing the number of edges. Since  $i = k$ , we have  $i' < i$  and then by Claim 7, thus

$$f_{i'} < f_i = f_k. \quad (2)$$

Note that  $F(n, i)$  is  $F$ -free, we have

$$\text{ex}(n, F') = f_{i'}n + O(d_{i'}) < f_k n + O(d_k) = e(F(n, k)) \leq e(G).$$

Thus  $F' = S^1 \cup S^2 \cup \dots \cup S^{k-1} \subseteq G$  by induction hypothesis.

It suffices to prove that there exists a vertex subset  $U \subseteq V(G)$  of order  $k-1$ , such that every vertex in  $U$  has linear degree, that is,  $d(v) = \Omega(n)$ . Indeed, if such a  $U$  exists, then  $G - U$  has to be  $S^k$ -free. Otherwise, say there is a  $S^k$  in  $G - U$ , then we can get  $F'$  using vertices in  $U$  as centers and their neighbors in  $G - U - S^k$  as leaves, which gives a copy of  $F' \cup S^k = F$ , which is a contradiction. Hence  $G \subseteq F(n, k)$  as desired.

Now we prove such a  $U$  exists. We know  $F' \subseteq G$ , namely there are  $k-1$  disjoint stars in  $G$ . Take any one of them, say  $S^j$ ,  $1 \leq j \leq k-1$ . Notice that  $G - S^j$  has to be  $F'$ -free, since otherwise a copy of  $F'$  in  $G - S^j$  together with  $S^j$  yields a copy of  $S^1 \cup S^2 \cup \dots \cup S^{k-1} \cup S^j$ . Since  $S^k \subseteq S^j$  we get that  $F \subseteq G$ , which is a contradiction. Note that  $e(G[S^j]) \leq \binom{d_j+1}{2}$  and  $e(G) \geq e(F(n, k))$ . Let  $e_0$  be the number of edges between  $S^j$  and  $G - S^j$ . Then we have

$$\begin{aligned} e_0 &= e(G) - e(G - S^j) - e(G[S^j]) \\ &\geq e(F(n, k)) - \text{ex}(n, F') - \binom{d_j+1}{2} \\ &\sim f_k n - f_{i'} n = \Omega(n) \end{aligned} \quad \text{by (2).}$$

Thus there is a vertex in  $S^j$  with linear degree. Since this is true for every  $j$  with  $1 \leq j \leq k-1$ , take the one with linear degree from each star, these  $k-1$  vertices form the desired set  $U$ .

This finishes the proof of Case (1).

**Case (2):**  $i \neq k$  and  $i \neq 1$

Let  $F^* = S^i \cup S^{i+1} \cup \dots \cup S^k$  and  $F' = F - F^*$ . Similarly if  $i'$  is the index maximizing the number of edges for  $F'$ , then  $f_{i'} < f_i$  by Claim 7.

**Claim 8.**  $\text{ex}(n, F^*) = \lfloor \frac{d_i-1}{2} n \rfloor$ .

*Proof.* Since  $i$  is the index maximizing the number of edges for  $F$ , thus for any  $\ell > i$ ,  $f_\ell \leq f_i$ , or  $\ell - 1 + \frac{d_\ell-1}{2} \leq i - 1 + \frac{d_i-1}{2}$ , this implies

$$\ell - i + \frac{d_\ell - 1}{2} \leq \frac{d_i - 1}{2}. \quad (3)$$

And by the induction hypothesis we have,

$$\begin{aligned}
\text{ex}(n, F^*) &= \max_{1 \leq i^* \leq k-i+1} \left\{ \left[ i^* - 1 + \frac{d_{i^*} - 1}{2} \right] n - \left\lfloor \frac{i^* - 1}{2} (i^* + d_{i^*} - 1) \right\rfloor \right\} \\
&\leq \max_{1 \leq i^* \leq k-i+1} \left\{ \left[ i^* - 1 + \frac{d_{i^*} - 1}{2} \right] n \right\} \\
&= \max_{i \leq \ell \leq k} \left\{ \left[ \ell - i + \frac{d_\ell - 1}{2} \right] n \right\} \\
&\leq \frac{d_i - 1}{2} n
\end{aligned} \tag{by (3).}$$

On the other hand, a  $S^i$ -free graph is  $F^*$ -free, thus  $\text{ex}(n, F^*) \geq \lfloor \frac{d_i - 1}{2} n \rfloor$ .  $\square$

Let  $G$  be an extremal graph for  $F$  on  $n$  vertices. Recall  $F' = S^1 \cup \dots \cup S^{i-1}$ , the choice of  $i$  and the extremality of  $G$  implies  $e(G) \geq e(F(n, i)) > \text{ex}(n, F')$ . Thus  $F' \subseteq G$ . As before if we can show there is a vertex with linear degree in each star in  $F' \subseteq G$ , then we have a set  $U$  of order  $i - 1$ , each vertex of which has linear degree and  $G - U$  is  $F^*$ -free. Then by Claim 8 we get  $G \subseteq F(n, i)$ .

Take any star in a copy of  $F'$  in  $G$ , say  $S^j$ , note that  $j < i$ . We take the same approach as before to prove that the number of edges between  $S^j$  and  $G - S^j$  is linear, namely  $e_0 = \Omega(n)$ , which implies the existence of a vertex with linear degree as desired.

Note that  $G - S^j$  must be  $(F - S^j)$ -free. We now give an upper bound on  $e(G - S^j)$ . Let  $F'' = F - S^j$  and let  $i''$  be the index maximizing the number of edges for  $F''$ .

If  $i'' < j < i$ , then by Claim 7,  $f_{i''} < f_i$  and thus

$$e(G - S^j) \leq \text{ex}(n, F'') \leq f_{i''} n.$$

Therefore  $e_0 = e(G) - e(G[S^j]) - e(G - S^j) \geq f_i n - f_{i''} n - \binom{d_j + 1}{2} = \Omega(n)$  as desired.

Notice that in  $F''$ , all indices after  $j$  were shifted to the left by one, that is  $F'' = S^1 \cup \dots \cup S^{j-1} \cup S^{j+1} \cup \dots \cup S^k$ . Thus if  $i'' \geq j$ , by the definition of  $f_i$ , then it is the same index as  $F$  that maximizes the number of edges for  $F''$ , that is  $i$  in  $F$  and  $i - 1$  in  $F''$ .

Thus  $i'' = i - 1$ . In this case  $e(G - S^j) \leq [(i - 1) - 1] + \frac{d_{i-1} - 1}{2} = f_i - 1$ . Thus  $e_0 \geq f_i n - f_{i''} n - \binom{d_j + 1}{2} = n - \binom{d_j + 1}{2} = \Omega(n)$  as desired.

This finishes the proof of Case(2).

**Case (3):**  $i = 1$ .

Let  $G$  an extremal graph for  $F$ . We want to show:  $e(G) = \text{ex}(n, F) = \lfloor \frac{d_1 - 1}{2} n \rfloor$ . Since an  $S^1$ -free graph is  $F$ -free,  $e(G) \geq \lfloor \frac{d_1 - 1}{2} n \rfloor$ .

We may assume  $\Delta(G) \geq d_1$ , since otherwise  $e(G) \leq \frac{d_1 - 1}{2} n$ . Let  $v$  be a vertex of degree  $\Delta(G)$ , so  $d(v) \geq d_1$ . Thus we can get a  $S^1$  from  $N(v) \cup \{v\}$  with  $v$  as its center. Note that since  $i = 1$ , we have for any  $j > 1$ ,  $f_j \leq \frac{d_1 - 1}{2}$ . Let  $F^* = F - S^1 = S^2 \cup \dots \cup S^k$ . Note that in  $F^*$ , all indices were shifted to the left by one. Hence if  $i^*$  is the index maximizing the number of edges for  $F^*$ , then it was  $j = i^* + 1 \geq 2$  in  $F$ . Thus  $f_{i^*} = [(j - 1) - 1] + \frac{d_j - 1}{2} = f_j - 1 \leq \frac{d_1 - 1}{2} - 1$ .

Let  $e_0$  be the number of edges between  $S^1$  and  $G - S^1$ , then  $e_0 = e(G) - e([S^1]) - e(G - S^1) \geq \frac{d_1-1}{2} - \binom{d_1+1}{2} - f_{i^*}n \geq n - \binom{d_1+1}{2} = \Omega(n)$ . Thus there is a vertex of linear degree in  $S^1$ , let it be  $u$ . This implies  $G - \{u\}$  is  $F^*$ -free. Thus

$$e(G) = d(u) + e(G - u) \leq n - 1 + \text{ex}(n, F^*) \leq n - 1 + f_{i^*}n \leq \frac{d_1 - 1}{2}n - 1 < e(F(n, 1)),$$

which is a contradiction.

This finishes the proof of Case (3) and hence also of Theorem 3.  $\square$

## 4 Forests with components of order 4

Now we consider the forest whose components are all of order 4. Notice that there are only two trees of order 4: the path  $P_4$  and the star  $S_3$ . Let  $F = a \cdot P_4 \cup b \cdot S_3$ . Let  $G_F^1(n)$  be the  $n$ -vertex graph constructed as follows: assume  $n - b = 3d + r$  with  $r \leq 2$ ,  $G_F^1(n)$  contains  $b$  universal vertices, the remaining graph is  $K_r \cup d \cdot K_3$ . Let  $G_F^2(n)$  be the  $n$ -vertex graph containing  $2a + b - 1$  universal vertices and the remaining graph is empty. See Figure 5. It is easy to check that both  $G_F^1(n)$  and  $G_F^2(n)$  are  $F$ -free as the set of universal vertices is too small.

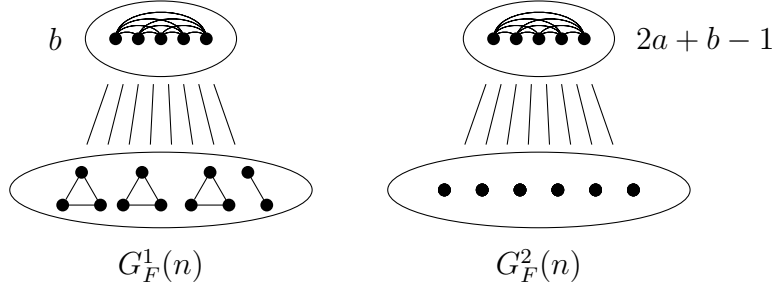


Figure 5: The extremal graphs for a forest with components of order 4.

**Theorem 7.** *Given  $F = a \cdot P_4 \cup b \cdot S_3$ , and  $n$  is sufficiently large and assume  $n = 3d + r$  with  $r \leq 2$ , then*

- (i). *If  $a = 1$  and  $r = 0$ , then  $G_F^1(n)$  is the unique extremal graph; if  $a = 1$  and  $r \neq 0$ , then  $G_F^1(n)$  and  $G_F^2(n)$  are the only extremal graphs.*
- (ii). *If  $a > 1$ , then  $G_F^2(n)$  is the unique extremal graph.*

We only give a sketch of the proof. Use induction on  $b$ , the number of copies of  $S_3$ . Let  $G$  be an extremal graph with  $n$  vertices, then  $e(G) \geq e(G_F^i(n))$ ,  $i = 1, 2$ . Thus  $G$  contains a copy of  $S_3$ , similar as the proof for star-forest, any copy of  $S_3$  in  $G$  contains a vertex, say  $v$ , of degree  $\Omega(n)$ . Then  $G - \{v\}$  must be  $F'$ -free where  $F' = a \cdot P_4 \cup (b - 1) \cdot S_3$ . Then by the

inductive hypothesis,  $G - \{v\}$  has to be  $G_{F'}^i(n-1)$ , which then implies  $G \subseteq G_F^i(n)$ . The base case of the induction is when  $b = 0$ , then the graph is  $a \cdot P_4$ . This also explains why we have two different constructions for the extremal graphs. Because when  $a = 1$ , by a result of Faudree and Schelp [11], vertex disjoint copies of triangles or a star are the extremal graphs (actually, they showed a combination of triangles and a smaller star is also an extremal case, but here, if any triangle appears, then the number of universal vertices will be fewer which yields a construction worse than  $G_F^1$  and  $G_F^2$ ); when  $a > 1$ , then Theorem 4 (or Theorem 2) implies that  $G_F^2(n)$  is the unique extremal graph.

The same technique can be applied on  $a \cdot P_\ell \cup b \cdot S_t$  but the proof is very technical.

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